Today Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, announced the availability of $250 million to expand the primary health care workforce. The funds are part of the federal reform legislation passed in March.

The funds will be used to expand the number of primary care physicians by 500 by 2015 and support training for additional physician assistants and nurse practitioners. States will be granted $5 million to plan and implement innovative strategies to expand their primary care workforce by 10 to 25 percent over the next ten years. For more details, see the DHHS fact sheet.

For a number of years, the shortage of primary health care providers has been an issue, especially in rural areas and high poverty urban areas. For any number of reasons, physicians are more likely to enter medical specialty areas. State legislative efforts to expand the numbers and scopes of practice for nurse practitioners and physician assistants often meet resistance. Both critics and proponents of the federal bill have identified the shortage of primary health care providers as an issue that will likely be exacerbated as more individuals have health insurance coverage.